

**Opening Statement
Chairman Connie Mack
Western Hemisphere Subcommittee
Markup of H.R. 3401 and H.R. 2542
December 15, 2011**

H.R. 2542, to withhold twenty percent of United States assessed and voluntary contributions to the Organization of American States (OAS) for every permanent council meeting that takes place where Article 20 of the Inter-American Charter is not invoked with regard to Venezuela's recent constitutional reforms, and for other purposes

I want to make this clear from the start – H.R. 2542 does not defund the Organization of American States. H.R. 2542 requires only that the OAS uphold its international commitments in order to receive U.S. taxpayer dollars.

Under this legislation, every time the OAS has an opportunity to uphold freedom and democracy by enforcing its Democratic Charter, and decides not to – the U.S. will save approximately \$11 million. If no action is taken to address individual Member States' gross noncompliance with the OAS Democratic Charter – the United States will have saved \$57 million by the end of 2012.

Like many of my colleagues, I prefer to have a functional and effective organization that upholds its commitments to democracy throughout our important region. However, the OAS has proven unable or unwilling to do so. The OAS should not continue to receive increased funding each year when it continuously fails to do its job.

A meeting was held yesterday at the OAS to discuss this specific issue – the fact that there is a clause in the Democratic Charter – Article 20 – designed to hold nations accountable for their anti-democratic actions.

The consensus within in the OAS is that Article 20 is not functioning. Prior to yesterday's meeting, the consensus was also that there was no need to amend the Democratic Charter. This is why H.R. 2542 is necessary; the OAS is unable to take concrete actions to fix its flaws without outside pressure.

Within the past year the OAS has failed to stand with the people of Venezuela and Nicaragua, while two years ago it was hypocritically punishing Honduras within days of that country's decision to stand on the side of freedom.

Yesterday in Venezuela, Chavez again displayed his control of the judicial system – forcing a judge to remain under arrest for another two years – just because the judge dared defy him in a routine ruling.

And there is absolutely no excuse for a statement by Secretary General Insulza supporting the Nicaraguan dictator Daniel Ortega's sham election as a "step forward for democracy."

While the OAS later withdrew the statement, the harm was already done. I shudder to think how much harm the OAS can cause during the Venezuelan elections next year.

The American taxpayer should not be expected to contribute almost 60% of the budget for an organization that works against the interests and fundamental principles of freedom and democracy.

This legislation is necessary to force needed changes within the Organization of American States. If the OAS finds that it is unable to make itself effective, there remains no reason for its continued existence.